DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 028 SO 033 320

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TITLE Subject Matter in Social Studies Teacher Education.
PUB DATE 2001-11-15
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Washington, DC, November 15, 2001).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Education Courses; Higher Education; *Knowledge Base for Teaching; Liberal Arts; Preservice Teacher Education; *Social Studies; *Teacher Education Curriculum; *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS Alternative Conceptions

ABSTRACT

Any comprehensive scheme of teacher education must confront the fact that the purposes, content, and methods of college liberal arts courses may hold limited relevance to the subject matters of the school curriculum. It has become customary to divide the education of U.S. social studies teachers into two main parts: liberal arts courses and work in education. The old teachers' colleges were organized to address the subject matter demands of teaching, but today, at state universities, responsibility for teacher education is commonly diffused. No one entity is responsible for assuring teachers' proper preparation in the pedagogical demands of subject matter. This paper outlines and discusses some approaches to subject matter education: inservice education through curriculum reform; standard college courses; and subject matter as only one of several important and interdependent elements of teacher education. The paper outlines an alternative approach to subject matter for educating the educators. It should be based on what teachers will be expected to teach, not merely the current interests of academicians. Social studies connects the student's personal experience with disciplinary and other subject matters, and their broader social significance. Educating teachers to bring about this kind of social studies program has been a challenge for teacher educators since the field was first conceived. (Contains 17 references.) (BT)

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Subject Matter in Social Studies Teacher Education[1]

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It has become customary to divide the education of American social studies teachers into two main parts: liberal arts courses and work in education. Liberal arts professors, with whom often the bulk of teacher preparation course work occurs, however, seldom consider themselves teacher educators. On the other hand, education school professors and supervisors tend to define their task as limited to pedagogical theory and practice, on the assumption that their students have already mastered the subject matter of the school curriculum in their liberal arts courses. These assumptions, by both groups of educators, may be customary, but do not well serve the enterprise of teacher education. The idea that subject matter and method are "separate affairs," John Dewey (1966) wrote, is "radically false" (pp. 164-165).

Differing Priorities of Academicians and Schoolteachers

Any comprehensive scheme of teacher education must confront that the purposes, content, and methods of college liberal arts courses may hold limited relevance to the subject matters of the school curriculum (Brophy, Alleman, and O'Mahony, 1999; Hunt, 1935; Thornton, in press). Academicians are usually most concerned with the frontiers of knowledge in their fields, and, of course, with more basic courses that prepare deeply interested students for more specialized study. As Dewey (1966) recognized, however, "the specialization of these topics are for the specialists" (p. 213). This material is most

[1] Paper prepared for a College and University Faculty Assembly symposium, "Tensions in Teacher Education: Content and Method in an Era of Reform," at the annual meeting of the National Council for the

suitable for majors in an academic subject. It may or may not be the best material for the subject matter demands of teaching.

The relevance of college liberal arts courses to the content of the school curriculum is questionable on another ground, too. Elementary and secondary education embraces goals likely to be of marginal or no direct interest to academicians. Teachers, however, are commonly expected to:

> Inculcate patriotism, extol the virtues of cultural pluralism, advance gender equity, encourage community service, educate about genocide, promote participation in government, praise free enterprise economics, arouse environmental awareness, venerate the wisdom of the Founders of the Republic. (Thornton, 2001a, p. 75)

The split between subject matter and method was once not so great. Their interdependence was the purpose of the old teachers' colleges, which disappeared in the mid-twentieth century. These colleges were well organized to address the subject matter demands of teaching. Of course, teachers' colleges had their drawbacks. They were likely to be staffed by professors who could not get positions in liberal arts colleges and students had less exposure to the frontiers of knowledge than in a liberal arts school. Their curriculum, however, was coordinated based on the needs of teacher education. Prospective high-school teachers majored in, for instance, history, but the courses were designed so that pedagogical concerns were interwoven with new subject matter (Noddings, 1998). When teacher education moved to academically more prestigious state universities responsibility for teacher education commonly became diffused. No one

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Social Studies, Washington, D. C., November 15, 2001.

entity was responsible for assuring teachers' proper preparation in the pedagogical demands of subject matter.

Some Approaches to Subject Matter Education

The questions of just what subject matter social studies teachers should have and how they should acquire it are scarcely new. Various pre- and in-service approaches have been tried since the rise of formal teacher education programs. Here I will examine three approaches and suggest an alternative. I contend that, while the first three approaches have their uses in teacher education, each suffers from significant limitations.

A first approach is in-service education through curriculum reform. It has a decidedly mixed reputation. Once teachers have settled on a view of subject matter changing it is difficult (see Thornton, 2001c). The new social studies movement, for example, arose out of the broader structure-of-the-disciplines movement in the 1960s. The dominant stream in social studies was the development of curriculum projects in the disciplines such as anthropology, economics, geography, and history. The instructional materials produced often required teachers modifying their conceptions of subject matter and method, especially conceiving of knowledge as a process rather than information. Unless teachers' conceptions of subject matter and method altered, the new curricula could not be satisfactorily implemented. Teacher education efforts included teacher workshops, field-testing of materials, articles in professional journals, and training selected teachers to disseminate the new approaches.

It is a cliché that new social studies materials failed to find systemic acceptance in American schools. Among other reasons, this is commonly attributed to teachers resisting

innovations. While no doubt holding more than a grain of truth, this may be an over-generalization. Some teachers embraced the new materials. Interestingly they were teachers who likely were already most savvy in subject matter. For example, social studies department chairs and teachers who belonged to professional associations disproportionately used and valued the new materials. Part-time "social studies teachers" such as coaches, in contrast, used and valued the new materials considerably less (Turner and Haley, 1975). It appears that teachers already better educated in subject matter (and method) are the most likely to become still more educated. More broadly, however, it underscores that reliance on the forms of in-service teacher education employed in the new social studies era appear to have limited effects on most social studies teachers.

A second approach to subject matter education is standard college courses, summer institutes (such as sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities), and so forth, conducted by conventional academicians. These may be either piecemeal or attempt a larger reconfiguration of subject matter education. Unlike the new social studies developers, this approach is not primarily concerned with translating scholarship into instructional materials. Rather it largely relies on the teachers themselves, after they have been instructed, to work out how this material might be used in units and lessons for the classroom. Piecemeal undertakings might entail a requirement, such as is being introduced presently in New York State, that prospective social studies teachers have had work in geography if they are to be licensed. In contrast, the M. A. T. (Master of Arts in Teaching) degree reconfigures subject matter preparation through emphases such as considerable graduate work in a particular discipline like history.

This approach, too, has significant limitations for teacher education. The subject matter demands of teaching and the interests of academicians do not always coincide. The material presented, in other words, may not be a significant component of the school curriculum. The paucity of direct attention to transforming the material for classroom use also seems an obvious limitation. Yet another limitation, which may not be inherent but seems to arise more often than not, perhaps goes unrecognized too much: academicians' pedagogy. I am not talking here about whether they are engaging or "good" teachers themselves, although that may be worth exploring. Rather I mean the normative model of subject matter they legitimate. Frequently academicians present subject matter as a completed product of thought, delivered by lecture, rather than a more open-ended and interactive process of inquiry. One group of researchers reporting the results of several nationally representative studies spoke to this point. Social studies teachers, they wrote:

> ...are not likely to be model inquirers themselves....
>
> This should be no surprise, given teachers' own schooling. Undergraduate history and social science college courses, as well as precollege courses, rarely involve students in active consideration of penetrating questions about the validity of knowledge. Nor is laboratory or field research commonly a part of such courses. (Shaver, Davis, and Helburn, 1980, p. 8)

A third approach to subject matter will almost certainly originate in a school of education rather than a liberal arts department. In this approach, subject matter is only one of several important and interdependent elements of teacher education. Regarding

subject matter, for instance, Linda Darling-Hammond (1999) writes that teachers need to understand the core ideas in a discipline and how these help structure knowledge. The kind of subject matter understanding she envisages "enables teachers to represent ideas so that they are accessible to others." These representations should connect "across fields and to everyday life" (pp. 223-224).

Aside from the "disciplines," Darling-Hammond does not appear to specify what subject matter looks like. By implication, she leaves that up to academicians. The educational purposes of students (and teachers) play no apparent role the selection of subject matter. This becomes particularly problematic when Darling-Hammond turns to the importance of teachers' ability to motivate all their students. She deems this pedagogical competency essential and says it must include "understanding what individual students believe about themselves and…what they care about" (p. 225).

Motivating individuals, however, compels attention to the individual student's interests and capacities. From this perspective, it cannot simply be assumed that subject matter identified by outsiders and made "accessible" by teachers will motivate all students to learn it. Nor, as Nel Noddings (1997) suggests, will the present practice of holding teachers "accountable" (or making them feel guilty) for not making every individual student "motivated" to learn material, which many of them may have no interest in learning (see also Dewey, 1963, p. 67). It is a grave mistake, Dewey (1975) warned, to look "*for* a motive for the study or lesson, instead of the motive *in* it" (p. 61).

Thus far, I have argued that the subject matter that best serves the needs of teacher education may properly differ from standard college liberal-arts courses. I have also suggested that conventional approaches to subject matter in teacher education have

significant inadequacies as preparation for the pedagogical demands of subject matter. In the remainder of this paper, I outline an alternative approach to subject matter for educating the educators.

An Alternative Conception of Subject Matter Knowledge

I can only briefly sketch here what this alternative conception might look like. It should be based on what teachers will be expected to teach, not merely the current interests of academicians. In higher education it is sometimes recognized that the mathematics needed by an engineer may differ from what is appropriate for a math major. Different tracks may result. This is seldom done for teachers.

World physical regions are often taught in fourth grade to illustrate the interrelationships of human and physical forces in the world. This has long been recognized as a basic building block of geographic understanding (see, for example, Thralls, Hart, and Grassmuck, 1933). It is questionable, however, if prospective teachers will systematically encounter this subject matter in their liberal arts courses. Rather, if they do take any work in geography it will be the same material intended for disciplinary majors. Perhaps this will touch on world physical regions, perhaps it will not.

Wonderful courses for teachers could be created. These need not be "watered down," the usual status worry attached to most aspects of teacher education. Rather they would examine basic material from a higher standpoint (Noddings, 1999). Whereas standard courses might focus on the depth appropriate for disciplinary majors, courses for teachers could emphasize lateral connections. For example, in a course for teachers, study of West African grasslands could attend to the customary relationships such as among

climate, natural vegetation, and population distribution. In addition, however, teachers could also look at subject matter to enrich the standard material with lateral connections within the social studies and with other school subjects. For example, they might study how Islam arrived in the region via caravans across the Sahara while Christianity arrived by sea and river or how folk tales and music, arts, and crafts reflect the physical and human landscape or how children and families lived traditionally and now or the process of desertification, and so forth. Such an approach to West African grasslands would provide teachers with rich connections that they could also apply to each child's particular interests within this new subject matter.

Naturally these courses could not deal with every conceivable topic in the school curriculum. But given the de facto national curriculum in social studies, it should be possible to take one or two illustrative topics from each grade level (Thornton, 2001c). With world physical regions, for example, grasslands and rain forests might be taken to illustrate how the concepts, principles, and relationships in each are similar and how they may need adjustment because of differing content. The aim is to both introduce new subject matter and model it as a "type" in contrast to mere coverage (Dewey, 1990, p. 108).

Conclusion

Until the strict boundaries that have grown up around subject matter and method are rethought, social studies teacher education continues to leave excessively to chance what is most essential: preparing teachers for the interdependence of subject matter and method. (In this paper, I have dwelled on the subject-matter end of this interdependence, but it applies equally to the method end.) Leaving subject matter to academicians and

then applying method to it after the fact misrepresents the challenge social studies curriculum and instruction present. Properly conceived, social studies connects the student's personal experience, disciplinary and other subject matters, and their broader social significance. Educating teachers to bring about this kind of social studies program has been a challenge for teacher educators since the field was first conceived. Directly preparing teachers for that challenge, however, rather than isolated segments of it, ought to be the cornerstone of teacher education in social studies.

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